DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 389 971 CG 026 413

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TITLE Family Life Education Programs and Student Attitudes.
PUB DATE [95]
NOTE 12p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Family Life Education; Family Relationship; Grade 8; Health Education; Junior High Schools; Junior High School Students; *Sex Education; Sexuality; *Student Attitudes

ABSTRACT

Family Life Education/Sex Education promotes learning about human sexuality, interpersonal relationships, and personal development. The purpose of this study was to determine the effect of a Family Life Education course on students' knowledge of and attitude toward sex. Sixty grade 8 students from a low socio-economic neighborhood in Chicago, Illinois were sampled. Thirty students were randomly selected from those who participated in the Family Life Education Program and given a pretest prior to attending the course and a posttest upon course completion. Using the t-test with rotation group designs, a test was done on the scores of the pretest and posttest to determine if there was statistical significance. Differences in student scores were statistically significant at the .05 level of confidence. Data leads to the rejection of the null hypotheses and the acceptance of the research hypotheses: Eighth grade students taught sex education in the Family Life Education Program will be more knowledgeable of and have better attitudes towards sex. Additional research in this area is essential for the future prediction of the effectiveness of Family Life Education Programs and the effect it has on teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. Contains 15 references. (JBJ)

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Family Life Education Programs and Student Attitudes

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There is a small percentage of Chicago Public Schools which have Family Life Education courses at the elementary school level. The effects of these programs are not well publicized. Administrators, teachers, parents, and local school councils need to know if students are benefitting from these kinds of programs. With the proper information, administrators can determine whether family life education programs have an effect on the very glaring problem of teen pregnancy, which interrupts the education of the student. This is one of the major reasons why research is needed in this area. The problem of teen pregnancy is a very serious one. It is not decreasing, it is increasing. The most current research that is available points to the fact that family life education courses improves student's knowledge of and attitude toward sex.

Another problem that family life education could have a positive effect on is sexually transmitted diseases. Educating students through family life education classes could help to save their lives.

Information about the effectiveness of sex education programs will be of great value to educational administrators and parents as well. This study will provide them with an accurate, current study of students receiving instruction in the family life education program. Once administrators have the information, they can better make the decision of whether or not to include family life education programs in their regular school curriculum. The decisions that administrators make today could have a profound effect on school systems and students for a long time. It could also impact the number of students who become pregnant, or the number of students who acquire sexually transmitted diseases. The statistical number of teenagers who have already been affected by pregnancy or sexually transmitted diseases is justification enough to take a long hard look at the effect of family life education programs.

Additional research is needed in this area. Also, administrators and parents need to examine the findings very very carefully, while considering how to approach the major problems of teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases.

In the 1980's many school systems began to update their policies concerning sex education classes in the schools. Prior to 1980, Illinois had been one of only four states to restrict dicussion of contraception in the classroom. Late in 1980,the Illinois State Board of Education updated its 1971 policy to strongly encourage local school districts to provide family life and sex education programs. The new policy suggested that birth control, natural family planning, venereal diseases, abortion and alternatives to abortion be included in the curriculum. The new policy also stipulated that, where contraception is included, there will also be instruction on abstinence.

Family Life Education/Sex Education is the learning about human sexuality, interpersonal relationships, and personal development which assists individuals in understanding their feelings, in making responsible choices, and in striving to reach their fullest potential as a human being. Sex education should be designed to help the individual develop acceptance, respect, and trust for oneself and others. It should also help develop knowledge of physical, emotional, and social growth and maturation, as well as understanding individual needs and the ability to make decisions. Sex education is a continuous life long process. It is also a complex process which includes attitudes and values, personal and interpersonal behavior as well as knowledge.

Parents have always had the authority to withdraw their children from sex/family life education classes. In several cases, parents have claimed that they possess the exclusive constitutional right to teach their children about sexual matters in their own home and that this right precludes the teaching of sex/family life education in the schools. No court system or legal authority has ever supported this claim. In the past, many school systems have prohibited teaching in some significant areas. With respect to abortion laws, certain states still prohibit sex education programs from counseling or advocating abortion. Advocacy of birth control methods and homosexuality are other sex education areas that the general public is still debating about today. The success or failure of sex education programs will depend upon more than learning the basic concepts and facts. Even more important are behavioral changes including attitudes, interests, practices and sexual conduct based upon the application of knowledge to daily living.

It is difficult to measure attitudes, practices, and sexual conduct. The seeking of such evaluative information may violate personal privacy and have serious legal and ethical implications. For these reasons it is strongly reccommended that all evaluative procedures be approved by the school administrator, the local curriculum committee, and the parents before they are used in the schools. This should also apply to student survey and questionnaire forms.

Veiwed collectively, the policies on sex/family life education need to be researched further in order to provide policy makers, school personnel, concerned parents, and others with valuable guidelines for developing programs that will meet adolescents needs and have strong community support. The next step in surveying the sex/family life education field is for researchers to explore how these policies relate to practice.

In order to determine the amount of sex education being taught at home to adolescents, Baldwin (1990) examined patterns of interaction within the family and the possible relationship of these patterns to the amount of sex education occurring in the home. The findings from 96 adolescents and the parents of 63 of them (61 mothers and 45 fathers) revealed that adolescents who reported open communication and satisfaction with family interactions reported significantly more sex education at home.

There has been much discussion concerning the barriers between teenagers and parents about sex-related topics. The concern has been communication. Bonnell and Caillouet (1991) examined students attitudes about communication with their parents and others on sex-related topics, with particular emphasis given to the barriers to parent teenager communication identified by the teenagers themselves, and to suggestions for improving openness in communication. Subjects, 105 male and 142 female students aged 14 to 19 enrolled in 11 sex education classes in 2 Kentucky high schools, completed confidential questionnaires on the same day to minimize discussion of the survey among students. Results indicated that: (1) 71% of the teenagers communicated freely with their parents about most topics, but only 52% said they communicated freely with their parents about sex or sex-related topics: (2) 30% said they could not talk comfortably with their mothers about sex while 47% said they could not talk with their fathers: (3) 58% of females reported close communication with their fathers about sex as compared to 33% of males: (4) teenagers cited 13 main reasons why they could not talk with their parents about sex, with embarassment cited by 29% of the subjects: (5) teenagers rated friends as their primary face to face source of sexual information, followed by teachers, parents, older siblings, other relatives, a doctor or nurse, and ministers. Findings underscore the need for parents (particularly fathers) to learn to communicate supportively and with empathy if not with agreement.

Recognizing the need for sex/family life education classes for inner city teenagers, (Hertz) 1984 reported on the impact of three family life education courses for black, inner city, junior high school students. A total of 172 students in 7th and 8th grades participated in experimental control groups. The pro grams varied in their intensity: students in the experimental group met for 40 minutes once a week for 15 weeks during the school day, while students in control groups met for 40 minutes once a week for 10 weeks. Results revealed that students in the more intensive program gained greater knowledge about reproductive physiology, contraception, and the consequences of teen pregnancy, and became more familiar with

various birth control methods. Changes in personal acceptance of premarital intercourse and perceived responsibility for contraception were observed only in the most intensive program.

Due to a large increase in pregnancies among native american adolescents, Ponzetti and Abrahamson (1990) emphasized the need for a more comprehensive approach to sex education. Incorporation of cultural awareness in sex education could improve self-concept among native american adolescents and help them recocile the cognitive, socialization, and situautional dimensions of sexual decision making according to their assessments.

In the study of Open Communication Teens or Parents Understanding Sexuality (Octopus) , a rural teenage pregnancy prevention program, Isenberner (1990) found that participants in this program which is presented in a religious setting usually gain in knowledge and self assessment, but teenagers showed no improvement in attitude and communication. It was believed that the religious setting would improve sexual attitudes and parent-child communication. Support groups, further discussion and evaluation was reccommended for this program.

Sex education for teenagers with special needs has also been a hot topic for discussion. The question has always been: should handicapped teenagers receive sex/family life education classes? Clark and Farley (1990) reveiws the research and the controversy concerning sex education for handicapped children and offers five guidelines including building self esteem, answering questions clearly and accurately, avoiding threats and jokes, and respecting childrens privacy. Of course as in all sex education programs, you must have the consent and support of the parents.

It is commonly felt that if teenagers have the information about sex they could make sexual decisions more responsibly. In a study to identify the needs of inner city teenagers, Hertz and Reis (1987) assessed the sexual decision making perceptions of responsibility for birth control and pregnancy, and the knowledge of contraception and the consequences of teenage pregnancy among 251 high risk seventh and eight grade Black, inner city adolescents. It was determined that there was a high need for information among these young people.

To assess the needs of mentally disabled students, Schultz and Adams (1987) administered 50 needs statements to 134 minimally and mildly mentally disabled adolescent students to identify their family life education needs as a basis for curriculum development. They identified six clusters or groups of family life education needs: Basic Nutrition, Teenage Pregnancy, Sex Education, Developmental Tasks of Adolescents, Marriage and Parenthood, and Planning and Decision Making.

In relation to socialization and sex education for the mentally retarded, Birch and Rouse (1992) describes a language based, problem solving sociolization and sex education curriculum designed for individuals with developmental delays. The curriculum aims to increase the students' understanding of themselves socially,psychologically, and physically abled to function more effectively in a society that is ever changing

In a discussion of Sex Education in the United States Incorporating Attribution and Social Learning Theory Denton,(1990) presents intervention techniques and attribution retraining research that will be a model for future sex education curricula.She includes the fact that teen pregnancies, and sexually transmitted diseases costs society in terms of adding to the tax burden by supporting people who have dropped out of the tax base without a job or education in order to have a baby or to repair their health. They also cost because of human potential of a young life interrupted and cut short with greater responsibilities than they can bear, in addition to perpetuation of the same cycle within a family. Incorporating social learning theory and attribution theory into sex education curricula in schools, churches, and community centers could reduce the rate of teen pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases in the United States. Attribution theory identifies causes that individuals typically select for success and failure outcomes and the concetual links between those outcomes and subsequent behavior. Social learning theory's major importance is the ability of individuals to abstract infgormation from the behaviors of others, make decisions about which behaviors to adopt, and later inact the selected behaviors.

Realizing the need for sex education in their schools, and the need of the entire for a model program, the Kentucky General Assembly (1988) enacted the Family Life Skills Act, which requires the teaching of parenting and family life skills to pupils in Kentucky schools.Pursuant to this act, the Kentucky Department of Education developed a model curriculum as a guide for local school districts to pattern their own family life programs after in compliance with the state legislation. The goal of the model curriculum is to provide learning experiences and guidance relevant to the needs, concerns, interests, and aspirations that arise out of human psychosexual development. It promotes premarital abstinence through a focus on the three r's: restraint, respect, and responsibility. Each grade level curriculum plan, kindergarten throgh grade 12, is divided into six units: Family Living, About-Me-Emotions, About-Me-Social, About-Me-Physical, Interpersonal Relationships, and Decision Making. Other parts of the curriculum includes teaching students about Acquired Immunity Deficiency Syndrome, (AIDS) Sexually Transmitted Diseases, and Personal Safety and Family Violence Prevention.

In a special project, Thornton (1982) reported on how to increase sexual information as well as social awareness skills through workshops for teachers and parents on family life education and social skills development. Evaluation of workshops by trainees revealed that the workshops had a positive impact on the respondents' perceptions of the social skills potential of their students or clients, that a majority of the workshop participants were incorporating elements of the workshop curriculum into their activities rather than attempting to establish new courses, that pre/post assessments of sexual attitudes and behavior yielded little change since the respondent was originally quite liberal, and that followup efforts indicated

that many respondents were using materials and information gained from the workshop in their teaching and/or consulting activities. This special project supported its findings with statistical data, samples of workshop agendas, sample questionnaires and subtests, and a sample federal form.

Literature on the relationship between family life education class and students knowledge of, and attitude toward sex is scarce. However, the literature reveiwed indicates that family life education is a basic component needed to make responsible decisions regarding sexual involvement. Familiarity with this subject matter can help students reach their fullest potential in life by protecting them from life altering situations. One study indicated that even though family life education did not cause students to have increased communication with their parents, it did increase their knowledge of sex education. When dealing with the subject of sex education, ignorance is not bliss, it is extremely dangerous and could significantly be life threatening. In contrast to the lack of literature on formal research relating family life education class to the improvement of student's knowledge of and attitude toward sex is the availability of an overwhelming number of articles stressing the benefits of implementing a sex education program into the school curriculum. Although the available literature is strongly in favor of family life education, it serves only as a foundation on which to build.

Therefore, the purpose of the study is to determine the effect of Family Life Education class on student's knowledge of and attitude toward sex.

Population/Sample

The population will include sixty eighth grade students. These students attend Beethoven Elementary School which is located in Chicago Illinois in a low socio-economic neighborhood, the Robert Taylor Homes housing development. The school has one thousand students in grades kindergarten through eighth. Thirty students will be randomly selected from the population of sixty eighth grade students who participated in the Family Life Education Program. The students who participated in the Family Life Education Program were given a pretest before the course started and a posttest after ten weeks when the course was completed. The test data was taken from the teachers resource book on sex education, which was used as the course instruction manual.

Findings

The data will be analyzed by using the t test with rotation group designs, which will be employed at the .05 level of confidence. To determine statistical significance, the calculated significance score will be compared with the table score in the distribution of t probability table.

Results

Using the t test with rotation group designs, a test was done on the scores of the pretest and posttest from the Family Life Education program to determine if there was a statistical significance. Table I summarizes the statistical analysis.

Table I

t-TEST FOR NONINDEPENDENT SAMPLES

STATISTIC	VALUE
NO. OF PAIRS OF SCORES	30
SUM OF "D"	48
MEAN OF D'S	1.6
SUM OF $"D"^2$	168
t-VALUE	4.9
DEGREES OF FREEDOM (d)	29

According to the table of t - (statistical significance exists) at .05 (confidence level), t= 2.04

Table I indicates that the difference in student scores on the Family Life Education Test is statistically significant at the .05 level of confidence and not the result of chance fluctuation.

A close examination of Table I reveals that the difference between the student scores is the result of the information given to the students during the Family Life Education Course.

Overall the data leads to the rejection of the null hypotheses and the acceptance of the research hypotheses: Eighth grade students taught sex education in the Family Life Education Program will be more knowledgeable of and have better attitudes toward sex.

It is recommended that more research be done on elementary school age children who are involved in Family Life Education Programs. Additional research in this area is essential for the future prediction of the effectiveness of Family Life Education Programs and the effect it has on teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases.

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